



The blessings of suffering and persecution

As mentioned in the previous article on suffering and persecution, it can happen that preachers who share the Gospel make the mistake to present living for Christ as trouble free and without adversity. However, that is not the reality of life. Throughout history, believers were persecuted for their faith. This was true of Old Testament prophets, of the Lord Jesus Himself, His disciples, as well as the first Church. And persecution is still happening in many parts of the world right now. So, what exactly does the Bible say about facing hardship in the Christian life?

In this article, we will look at what the Word says about the blessings of persecution. What happens in the life of an individual facing and going through hardship and persecution for their faith in Christ? There are many blessings, but we will touch on five that stand out.

The blessings of persecution

1. Perfection

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. (2 Corinthians 13:5)

The moment we encounter opposition and persecution, it causes us to look at who we are, what we do and our true motives for doing it. Introspection of our attitudes, words and actions are very important. Bring all these things before the Lord in prayer – ask the Holy Spirit to convict your heart where you need to change. Also ask for grace to continue to do what is right before Him, however hard it may seem. Allow the Word of God to show you how to walk in His ways, and how to make amendments to your way of doing things. As you allow the Lord to prune you, you are refined and perfected in your faith.

2. Being established in the faith

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established... (Romans 1:11).

Paul understood which specific gifts those in the church in Rome would need in order for them to do the ministry entrusted to them by the Holy Spirit. He wanted them to not only do ministry, but become established in what they believed. Living in Rome could easily have cost you your life. Likewise today, people respond differently to hardships. Some may grow cold and distant from God, while others choose to run to God no matter the hardship. Every time we choose not to yield to our emotions when facing persecution, we will grow stronger in our faith. Also, when we see someone else suffering persecution, but still holding on to God and growing spiritually, it encourages our faith immensely. Sit down with the Lord today and consider your own life. What is

your emotional response to hardships and persecution? Ask the Lord to strengthen you and help you grow spiritually, despite your circumstances.

3. Spiritual strength

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. (1 Peter 5:10).

The Greek word here is: **sthenoo (Strong's #G4599)**, meaning *to bind together and strengthen so there will be no danger of warping, splitting, or falling apart*. The Holy Spirit and God's Word are our daily sources of strength. They have the power to carry us through every, and any, trial or temptation we may face. Spending time in God's Word and yielding ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit strengthen us spiritually, just as physical exercise does the body. Consider your own life with the Lord. How much time do you give to reading your Bible and listening to the Holy Spirit to show you some deeper meaning of a certain passage? These practices mingled with prayer will make you stronger.

4. Rooted and grounded in love

...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love... (Ephesians 3:17).

The Greek word here is: **themelioo (Strong's #G2311)**, meaning *a good foundation*. To be rooted means to not be moved. Being grounded in something means that you have become deeply familiar with it – 'you know that you know'. Any building that can stand the test of time, does so because of the good foundation that it was built on. To lay a solid foundation takes time, effort and skill. Hardships can establish us in Christ like few other things can. Think about your life and seasons that were especially challenging. How did you respond? Then consider the times in your life when you experienced the most spiritual growth. Do these coincide? Speak to the Lord about these things and ask the Holy Spirit to help you become even more rooted and grounded in Christ's love.

5. The spread of the Gospel increases

... Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. 5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. 6 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. (Acts 8:1-6) Also read: Acts 11:19-21.

The sudden persecution that arose must have been very traumatic for these Christians, to say the least. If they were able to 'pray away persecution', however, the Gospel would never have been successfully preached in all the places they went to while fleeing. (Also read: Philippians 1:12-14). The apostle Paul spent several years in prison. One could argue that it might have been better for such a successful evangelist if God had allowed him to continue his travels. Imagine how many more souls could have been saved? Yet, it was during his prison years that Paul wrote a very large part of what we have as the New Testament today, serving as God's foundation of the Christian life, conflict management and ministry. Contemplate your own life – if you look back on certain

hardships now, can you see how it worked together for your good? And that your life now bears more fruit than it would have done otherwise?

Further reflection

There are many more blessings of fruit one can list which come from the mysterious working of hardship, difficulty and persecution in our lives. Consider making a print-out of this article and prayerfully revisit each point over the next few days. Spend time with the Lord and let Him show you from His perspective what is taking place in your life, and how your life has become more surrendered and fruitful. If you spot any areas where more growth and fruit is needed, ask the Holy Spirit to help you with those.